

In the eye of



the storm



Forget the one-two punch. It was more like a one-two-three-four punch as three hurricanes and a tropical storm pummeled the Texas Coast in three months. The four events tested Texas like never before. And when Texas called, many in EMS responded. We are grateful to the hundreds of EMS providers and personnel who put their own lives on hold to answer the call.

But many first responders were in danger themselves, their homes and livelihoods directly in the path of the storm. When the skies cleared, the extent of the damage was almost incomprehensible. EMS and fire department buildings and equipment were completely destroyed, leaving no emergency response infrastructure. And in many cases, the responders and DSHS staff themselves had damaged homes — or no homes — to return to after Hurricane Ike, including those in Gilchrist and Crystal Beach. Cindy Kreutzer, a shift commander with Beaumont EMS who lived in Gilchrist, snapped this photo of Gilchrist VFD's reserve unit, which was swept out of the station during the storm. (See what's left of the station on page 3.) Kreutzer and her husband lost their home. Brian Forey, a paramedic with Crystal Beach, wrote that all the fire stations on Bolivar Peninsula were destroyed. The stories were numerous and heartbreaking. But words don't do the subject justice. We hope the following photos best tell the story of what was lost and the sacrifices made.

By Kelly Harrell

At right, Texas Task Force 1 personnel were deployed just before Hurricane Ike hit to check Galveston Island for any residents who needed to be evacuated. After the storm, TxTF-1 conducted a house-by-house search of the island for survivors and accompanied residents back through the destroyed communities. Many streets were left with just a few houses still standing after the Category 2 hurricane hit the island in September. *Photo: Texas Task Force-1*

Below, when Ike took a turn north and set its sights on Galveston, the decision was made to evacuate UTMB. Acadian Ambulance personnel helped transfer NICU and critical care patients from Galveston to Austin before the storm. Nearly 200 patients went to facilities across the state, including several premature babies and two liver transplant patients. After arrival in Austin, Acadian and other services took patients to local facilities. *Photo: Lea Ann Broussard*

They didn't teach this in paramedic school! Below right, Lewisville FF/Paramedic Mark Murphree, Engineer/Paramedic David Pennington and Flower Mound Fire Captain Billy McWhorter carry a 4 1/2-foot alligator back to a bayou after they located it in a lawn while doing secondary searches in Bridge City Texas. The group was part of a team that searched for survivors in the rubble. Lewisville personnel were part of the

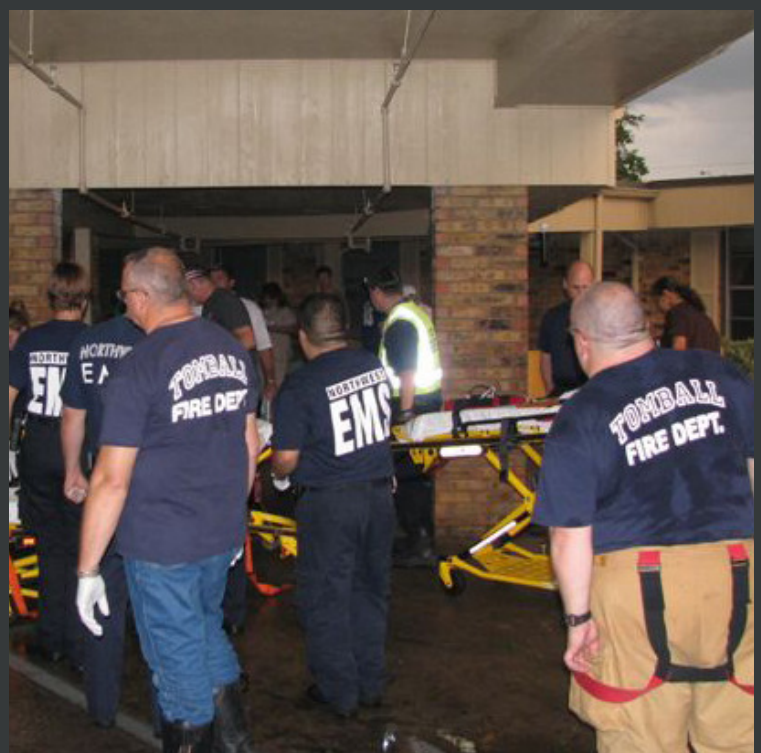




Denton County Task Force that responded to Galveston and Orange counties after the storm. *Texas EMS Magazine* received several photos of alligators left high and dry after the storm. *Photo: David Brown*

Below left, East Texas Medical Center EMS helps evacuate East Houston Medical Center before Ike came ashore. Hurricane Ike represented one of the largest evacuations of people in the history of Texas. Hundreds of ambulances from Texas and across the nation were used to evacuate medically fragile patients in the storm's path. East Texas Medical Center EMS sent crews during hurricanes Dolly, Gustav and Ike. *Photo: David Taylor*

Below right, just before the brunt of the storm, Northwest EMS responded to a roof collapse and fire at a local nursing home. By the time they arrived, the weather had deteriorated to the point that EMS had to shelter in place with 167 patients for about 18 hours until the storm winds subsided enough to allow for evacuation of the patients. All in all, about 30 ambulances and 19 buses responded. Northwest EMS Director Brian Petrilla directed the nursing home operations along with help from Waller County EMS Director Bevin Hollan. During the storm, a nearby hotel sustained damage, necessitating evacuation of about 90 people. *Photo: Northwest EMS*





Above, ambulances stage at Kelly Air Field in San Antonio, waiting on assignments from the Alamo Regional Medical Command. After Hurricane Ike turned to the north, the response shifted toward Galveston, where the Catastrophic Medical Operations Center, located in Houston, took command. Ambulances were staged and deployed out of San Antonio, Houston, and Beaumont after the storm. *Photo: Pat Campbell*

The fire/EMS departments on Galveston Island, including Gilchrist VFD, Port Bolivar VFD and Crystal Beach VFD, were left in shambles. Left, the Crystal Beach station is nearly unrecognizable except for the bay doors. Photographer Brian Forey says the storm surge and wind destroyed all the station's supplies and records. The storm destroyed the homes of many of the medics and firefighters who responded to emergencies on the island.

You can't call it fancy, but it was a place to get some rest. Above right, EMS responders from around Texas responded as Hurricane Dolly churned toward

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South Padre Island. EMS responders got a chance to rest between shifts in dorm-like settings. Dolly was the first time the strike team leader model was used, assigning personnel and ambulances to strike leaders, who were responsible for several units. The model worked well for the next two hurricanes and tropical storms that affected Texas in 2008. *Photo sent in by Dudley Wait*

Right, hundreds of ambulances convoyed east from San Antonio after Hurricane Ike to evacuate medical facilities damaged in the storm. Many units stopped in Columbus to refuel and take a break at the rest stop. DSHS mobilized nearly ten strike team leaders and 100 units from across the state through its MOA with EMS providers. DSHS staff were available 24 hours a day to answer questions from those deployed. *Photo: Paul Smith*

